



## Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

## THE WING OF DEATH—II

BY ELIZABETH SHEPLEY SERGEANT

---

*On the Train. October 23rd.*

THE war. What does it mean? Had I even a glimmer of its significance all this past year when I was writing about it before it really got under my skin?

\* \* \*

Knowledge of war has come by a gradual absorbent process, a sort of slow penetration with its dark background. As it affected the French nation primarily. And especially my French friends in Paris. Their lives at first seemed surprisingly normal. But gradually these lives came to appear subtly distorted, as faces are distorted by a poor mirror—or by a hidden fear. And their spirits: when their once so vital and humane spirits were not full of sinister images, they were empty, as the streets were empty during those drab dragging months that preceded the German Spring offensive. The months during which the growing numbers of Americans in the Y. M. C. A. and the Red Cross were discovering the restaurants, and taking war like the rain.

What was war to the A. E. F.? In the beginning “a great game,” played with wharves, and freight yards and storehouses and ice-plants. A great game: I shall never forget the spur to hope that pricked me during my journey from one end of our army to the other in the early months of this year, the sense I got of the constructive force that moved it.

But the end of March changed all that. For America only less than for France war then became a drama: intense, vibrant, lurid. A drama that went on steadily in one’s own inside, whatever one’s superficial activity, and that might well have a tragic ending.

Not like Greek tragedy any longer. And the front and the rear are continuous. Refugees, Red Cross men dashing back and forth from their posts, fighters on leave, wounded;

the big gun, the raids, the fleeing industries and banks—Paris is now war zone. America is at Cantigny on one side, at the Bois de Belleau on the other. Paris is Germany's objective. Paris is ourselves. Paris is the heart of America, as well as the heart of France.

\* \* \*

Paris is saved. But the war goes on. Deeply and yet more deeply is America involved. Not in her brains only, in her flesh. In the flesh, above all, of those tall sinewy young men in the twenties, who swing so smartly and so sternly down the Champs Elysées on July 4th. Those young men who should be the future of our country. Our finest. If one begins to know now what war means, this is the reason. Sympathy for French or British never brought quite this look into American faces. All the girls who are caring for French orphans and refugees feel they must nurse; pour out their life blood too in night watches; steel their nerves, too, by holding firmly the ghastly mutilated limbs. Their former chauffeurs and farmers are their brothers; their children. Dearer, because so helpless and bereft and in pain.

\* \* \*

How soon will Lang and Sid be lying on hospital cots, or worse? Where are they at this moment? The blind query, intensified since my accident, has been gnawing at my consciousness these two months past; since the little Anglo-American lieutenant of twenty—so much more philosophical than the tall American lieutenant of twenty-seven—disappeared towards the British lines after our walk in *vieux Paris*; and the radiant Californian treated me to a last lunch at the Ritz before St. Mihiel. Both great lovers of life and of France. Both fully expecting to die some fine morning, "doing a definite thing for no very concrete reason," as the American put it. Both taking a simple and immense pride in their dead comrades, a pride devoid of heroics. In the war they are fighting there is no place for either oratory or vindictiveness. "I have never wasted ten minutes hating the Germans," says Sid. The British lieutenant hasn't either. But he has lost, as the American has not, all zest for war in itself. He envies his American cousins their faith and enthusiasm, goes back to the front with a rather wistful serenity. While the Californian is passionately longing to achieve his aviator's destiny.

This generation of the twenties has been the important one, in every country, since 1914. Its reactions to war are rawly honest, not befogged by convention, like those of older men. And Harvard, and Yale, and Princeton, and California, feel just as much need to talk and write them out as Oxford, and Cambridge, and the Sorbonne and the Ecole Normale have done. In the last year I have learned a good deal about how the tremendous business looks to half a dozen very diverse young Americans. To Ernest, doing his responsible job in the rear of the A. E. F.; to Pink at his governmental post in Paris; to two or three Red Cross men; to Sid at the front. Sid at St. Mihiel, in the Argonne, flight commander of a bombardment squadron, sending letters from the thick of the only war activity that has any romance left.

"If I come out of it," he writes me, "I shall look back on it as the only reality amidst all the pale mirages of experience I have known. There is no experience possible wherein man is not at grips with ultimate fate. The only contrast is the contrast of life with death, and the only living making nothing of life. I seem unable to stay out of the air here. If I miss a raid I am wretched until my turn comes again. I don't seem to know myself. I am neither a hero nor a degenerate. I have found no new surprise in Archies, only a new slant on an old subject in real war flying. And yet my whole state of being has shot up like a rocket. I am having (I suppose literally) *the* time of my life. That is the final consolation to death in battle. It doesn't much matter what happens once the climax comes. The men I saw go down in flames yesterday were friends of mine. I knew it. Even that didn't matter. It's the *damndest* thing."

\* \* \*

I am not to be persuaded that love of adventure makes war good, any more than the spirit of sacrifice, or the patient endurance of pain. Is it good for the world, for his mother, or for the boy himself, who is so gifted for life, that Sid should be killed? And for how many individuals of the millions of fighters has this war, after all, been good? To prolong it by one unnecessary day, hour, minute, would be criminally wrong—of that at least I am sure, after the evacuation tent.

Like the soldier, I feel no bitterness and very little surprise at my individual lot. At every stage I have said to myself: "So this is what it is like"—to drive from hospital to hospital, for instance; or to lie on the floor interminably while indifferent people walk about and brush your face with a foot or a skirt. Certainly I did not want to be hurt. But I have still less right than the soldier to complain. Voluntarily, for the sake of my profession I ran a risk—slight it seemed—and luck was against me.

Mine is no more than a pin-point of sharp experience in a vast catastrophe. Yet its stab unites me to millions of other human beings. To the little poilu of the hospital who, under other circumstances, might have accepted a franc for carrying my bag across a platform. *Unanimisme*—what potency it has. It is that which keeps war going. Every American in Europe today, however bad his fate, feels in his heart of hearts glad to be here. Glad not to miss the great adventure of the years 1914-1918. For whether war be good or bad, whether it means purgation or damnation for civilization, it is still the adventure of these years. And if one shares, why not up to the hilt? Why not pay the piper?

There my logic fails. I am willing to pay—perhaps; I don't yet know how heavy the price. But not to let others. Not the little poilu. Not the man with no face. Nothing must happen to Ernest, far from his wife and baby. The war must end before H. loses her second son; before Sid goes down in flames.

\* \* \*

Dark now. And I am suddenly terribly tired. The hard stretcher has eaten its way into the very marrow of my back. The doctor takes my temperature with a frown. Says we shan't arrive before ten o'clock—ten hours' journey. He has had too much *pinard*. So has the orderly. I have a sneaking hope that somebody somehow knows I am coming. If only, oh, if only I might find an *American* face—Gertrude's? Ernest's? on the platform.

*October 24th. American Hospital of Paris.*

I am reincarnated, as a perfect lady in a perfect sick-room, full of flowers. Flowers after Mont-Notre-Dame. And the peace of being alone within four spotless, gray-white walls. Fresh white curtains, white cushions, white

furniture. A long French window into a garden. October tree tracteries—black and gold and purple, like Versailles—against the sky. A bell-rope, the genius of which is a beautiful young Alsatian girl, in blue and white, who brings lemonade made of real lemons that quench fever; tea on a tray with dainty strips of toast; ungreasy bouillon; eggs refined to custard; hot water bags which yield to pressure instead of repelling it. I wonder if cantankerous souls exist who think this hospital a prison?

I have been in a state of exaltation ever since Colonel L. got my stretcher out of the ambulance, well after midnight, and down the white corridor which ended in a white bed—with pillows! A night-nurse with melting Portuguese eyes. A middle-aged surgeon in a dressing gown. A hypodermic. This was Neuilly. Blissful haven.

Much good M. Clemenceau's recommendation did me, though. I still hear the gray-beard of a regulating officer ranting over me in the hospital tent at the station, while I tried to hold on to my self-control and my wits. High fever and great pain by that time. Ranting because he did not know where to send me; because the ambulance boys hadn't come. The hours they took in coming.

And the face that peered into the little window of the ambulance from the driver's seat when the "boys" deserted me in the velvet blackness in front of the Hotel de France et Choiseul. "An *apache*," I thought. On the contrary, the poor old literary night-watchman, blubbering over my hand, nearly, in his emotion, tolling the bell that roused us so often for raids to give notice that here I was again. Several sympathetic shades of my dead life collected about the ambulance, as it was. And the Colonel, spruce and good-humored, in spite of the hour, climbed in and sat himself down on the other stretcher, as if for our usual war gossip. How many times did he say "I'll be damned" on the way to Neuilly? For once I made the Colonel sit up.

The whole of my previous existence in war-time Paris returned with a rush this morning; as normally as if the sealed world of Mont-Notre-Dame, the world bounded wholly by pain and death, the world where only wounds and poilus existed, had never been. But for that slowly winding train, which somehow linked the two together (how often have I similarly readjusted my universe between Boston and New York!) I should be dazed to find myself once

more in the midst of war-rumor, political discussion, and familiar entities like the Y. M. C. A., the A. R. C., and the A. E. F. It was the blue and gray "Y" that came dashing in first, in the person of Gertrude; red cheeks, solicitous eyes sparkling through her glasses, armfuls of fruit and flowers, and stores of her rarer gifts of high spirits, generosity and humorous human interest. And then the steel-gray Red Cross, personified in R. M., with her warm, wise smile and limitless capacity and kindness. Both assuming my responsibilities, reinforcing friendship with the power of these great organizations that I have spent so much time studying and criticising. (Glad I am now always to have maintained that their virtues outweigh their deficiencies.)

Then came along the men, Pink, A. R., W. L., C. M., and others, all equally human and concerned and wanting to shoulder my responsibilities. My stoicism would certainly ebb away from contact with this flood of friendliness and flowers, if everyone were not so obviously relieved, especially the men, to find me not a nervous wreck. The crisis is very near, they think. I must get to work again. In fact I have engaged a stenographer for next week. If convalescent poilus make bead chains in bed, why should I not string words together?

\* \* \*

My little blue and white nurse reproves me for writing tonight. Perhaps I am tired, for the doughboy voices from the garden disturb me. It is my heart, not my nerves, that the A. E. F. troubles. The garden holds a Red Cross tent hospital, an overflow from "Number One," the big ambulance in the Boulevard Inkermann. The wounded—in khaki here—are hobbling by my window, on crutches mostly, to their supper. Rattle of tin plates. End of a lighted tent projecting into my field of vision. It is unjust that I should be enjoying daintiness and luxury, under a real roof, while soldiers are outside where rain can drip and stoves smoke. And the worse of it is that it will soon seem natural that I should be here and they there.

*October 25th:*

My fate as a *blésée* is in the hands of an American surgeon of remote French descent, who appears to be even more of a Francophile than I am. A Southerner, with very

Gallic airs, and almost Provençal loquacity. I already know much of his family history—great surgical family. *Grand'père* volunteered under Napoleon and made the retreat from Moscow; *père* Deputy-Surgeon General of the South in the Civil War. He himself volunteered in the French Army at the beginning of the war, and served three years before transferring to the A. E. F. He operates half the day here, and half at "Number One." He has a casual manner, jollies the pretty little nurses in a Franco-American jargon of his own (good accent, though). He would like me better if I would only laugh at his jokes, or cry pathetically, while being dressed. I can just preserve a stony silence. He handles my wounds like a connoisseur, not to say a lover of wounds.

I can't altogether cheat myself into thinking I have returned to the old world, though. Not so long as I have a daily dressing. The intensity of apprehension I feel when the surgical cart is wheeled in, and my bed wheeled out, and the surgical nurse begins to undo things, humiliates me. For I do not believe in the importance of physical pain—until my leg is lifted out of the splint. Then I don't believe in anything else. Dr. M. cheerfully tells me to yell. He says the difference between French and American wounded is that the Frenchmen howl, but keep their arms and legs still, and the Americans mutely sweat but wriggle in all directions. He congratulates me on the work of the French surgeon, who, it seems, did a very skilful job in saving the left foot at all. That information sends a cold shiver to my uttermost parts.

*October 28th:*

The face of the world changed again. I am to have the wounded soldier's experience, *jusqu'au bout*. Infection in left foot. It set in on Friday evening. The work I imagined myself beginning today is remote. Virtue has been trickling out of me, and fever and pain flowing in. How did I ever write at the other hospital, on the train? All I care about now is quiet. And air, fresh, cold air, because I feel stifled and contaminated. And a nurse, a quiet nurse, always there. R. M. has sent one; fair, pink-cheeked, shy, slow, steady. A Norwegian Red Cross nurse, from a North Dakota farm, just landed; the very antithesis of the quick, sophisticated little French pupil



nurses who have been in and out like humming-birds.

Visitors eliminated. I couldn't even talk to Ernest when he came hastening up from Dijon yesterday. I couldn't even bear the sound of his voice. But the affection in his eyes sustains me yet. (Fine, frank, judicious brown eyes.) That is something I dare let down the bars of stoicism to—family affection. More sustenance there than in the rather dubious words of Colonel B., whom Colonel L. brought in consultation this morning. (Shall I lose my foot yet?) Our most distinguished American surgeon looks the part, with a becoming greyness. Acts it, too. Dr. M., whose "*spécialité*" seems to be always to be somewhere else when demanded, failed to turn up on time.

I have just had my first irrigation with Dakin solution, through two Carrel tubes in my left foot. Now I know how *that* feels, too. I little thought, when I accepted Dr. Flexner's invitation to hear Dr. Carrel lecture on this great contribution to modern surgery at the Rockefeller Institute, that those lurid Pathé pictures of wounds would soon have such a personal import. May my wounds heal with the miraculous rapidity which Carrel described!

At best it will be a slow business. Hospital till January at least. The doctor told me the first morning that I should eventually walk comfortably "on a level." My face must have fallen for he inquired, with a twinkling glance at my many bandages, whether I was an Alpinist. Couldn't I make ascensions by funicular? I have been haunted ever since by the fear that I may never climb Page Hill, Chocorua, or High Pasture, Dublin, again. I am just as much in need as ever of their wild, sweet junipery flavor and their spacious views. No more different because a hand grenade has hit me than Sid is different because he has dropped bombs on Germans.

*October 30th:*

I was wrong. Sid is changed. Not by dropping bombs, probably. By his brother's death, and the decimating battle of a month ago. Grey and stern he looked as he stalked in. Scarcely a flicker of his happy young smile. Moving heavily instead of with his usual light ease. ("Thrifty-like" our Irish Mary once called him, which means a fine upstanding lad, and nimble on his feet.)

He sat down in the corner of the room farthest from my bed, and regarded me broodingly, out of eyes black in their sockets. Not as if he were sorry for me. Not as if it were odd that I should be in bed with wounds and broken bones, and he intact. Rather, aggrieved. As if this were just one straw too much.

The rest of his reconstituted squadron has gone to Nice on leave. He doesn't like the new men. Couldn't stand that sort of thing anyhow, just now. But he counted on my being as usual, more than usual perhaps, a sympathetic ear, a safe family friend, a literary comrade—someone to see him through. And I am of no use. (He didn't say it, any more than the poilu at the hospital said it, but he looked the same reproach.) I can't even eat a meal with him. I elicited the fact that he is eating alone, at the Café de Paris. Why the Café de Paris? Not like you. No. That's it. Because he never ate there with P. or R. or the other eight friends who were blotted out at the end of September. He couldn't go to Voisin's because it was there that he found P. eating that historic gourmand's lunch—tended by six waiters holding the choicest wines of the *cave* in their arms. Nor could he go—well, anywhere. He is paying in one large lump for all the leaves (and especially the A. W. O. L's.) he has taken here in the last year.

Were they all killed, the men he lost? Probably some prisoners. The ghastly part is that he lost track of them for about fifteen minutes, when his plane was out of control. His observer—who was P. his closest friend—shot dead, fell on the rear controls, and he could only steer blindly into Germany, pursued by twelve Boches with forty-eight machine guns. When he came to, there was just one of his six planes behind him. The pilot, young P. was going across for the first time. Wonderful pluck, the way he stuck to Sid's tail. That was what got Sid back again. (Sid never admits his own bravery.) Now young P. has been lost too. He must go to see the family in Paris. It seems that he does nothing but look up the families—or write to them.

How many times have you been shot down? Five. Never a scratch. He showed me, hanging on his wrist, one of the bullets that embedded itself in the plank under his feet on September 25th. The plane was a total wreck.

He has received answers from my cables to his family. His Mother has been splendid. (Tough luck to lose B. Tough for the boy not to have got to France. To die in a camp of pneumonia. He can't talk of that). She says he is not to try to get released on her account. So he will go back to the front. Go back soon. Paris is a graveyard.

The doctor had allowed my visitor five minutes. But how shall I send him away if he gets any dim comfort here; sitting on in the corner, tilted on two legs of the stiff chair, his long, straight, powerful profile, ending in a jaw two sizes too big, outlined against the grey wall. Rain-in-the-Face. He might just as well have his aviator's helmet drawn over his head. For there is where he is: at the front. He is quite unaware of the effort I have to make to drag my voice out of the depths of my head. I remember to what a tune he cheered me up at that Ritz lunch—with a pang. Not for myself. He is sunk in trouble; completely immersed in that intense and violent world whence he has come.

It seems impossible to write his Mother a cheerful letter, as I have done after his other visits to Paris. How should I write of anything but war as I see it now? War choking itself out in spasmodic breaths through dark nights in hospital tents. Faces blackening into death. Fine straight young limbs turned rigid. And why should Sid get through, even now, though such a natural adventurer? The zest is gone, and that may be just enough to turn the scales of his luck. There is no reason why he shouldn't be killed on the last day, in the last hour.

Finally he gets up. Lights a Fatima abstractedly. Says he has a taxi eating its head off out there. Sticks on a jaunty cap. Shakes his broad shoulders in his smart, French-cut uniform. Gives a faint flicker of a smile. Avoids shaking hands. But stops at the door an instant and looks at me with a sudden hope. Perhaps I have a panacea? No, there she is, ill in bed. Wounded. For one second he seems to take that in as it affects me. Hastily extinguishes the Fatima. Then he flickers again. And is gone. Back to the front.

*(To be Concluded.)*